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Today's Problems in India

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"It is hard to visualize Christian missions in India because the character of the problem and the ways of meeting that problem differ in different parts of a country which is two thirds as large as the United States, but which contains three times as many people," says a bulletin issued from the Washington, D. C., headquarters of the National Geographic Society.

"Not only does the geographic environment of India vary from the deserts of Sind to the steamy coasts of Bombay or Madras presidencies, from the paddy fields of South India to the rocky gorges of the Chamba district, but the religious environment varies greatly as well and adds immeasurably to the complexity of the missionary program.

Indian Temples Places of Confusion (Subhead)

"The visitor to Indian temples will see more to remind him of the 'father's house made a house of merchandise' than he will of the spiritual sublimity of a true temple. Money changers flank the entrances; the courts are crowded with sellers of cheap notions and toys; the whirl of sewing machines fashioning new garments drowns out the mumbled prayers of the penitent; priestly palms are stretched forth in

search of alms more often than in benediction. Only in the Mohammedan mosques will one find a sincerity of worship and a simplicity of religious service which compares favorably with Christian ceremonies.

"The Mohammedan of the north must be approached in an entirely different way from the Hindu or Dravidian peoples of the south with their thousands of gods and their degraded religion. The lordly Sikh requires a different approach from that which wins the love and respect of the outcaste of the Telegu region. Yet India is overburdened with doctrines and a Christian life stands out the more plainly because in the native religions there is too loose a relation between piety and good works. The man who stops to go through the genuflections of an idolatrous prayer before paying a visit to a temple dancing girl, and the Mohammedan who purifies his body before joining in the proclamation that there is no god but God and that Mohammed in His prophet are both cognizant of the personal character of the Christian missionary.

"Mission work varies as much as church work does in America and at the same time does many things which other institutions do in American life. There is the intensive work in certain centers which includes evangelical, educational and medical work such as is done by metropolitan churches with their satellite chapels and social service activities; by the public, private and denominational schools and colleges; and by the public clinics and hospitals of a large city.

Colleges Like Those of America (Subhead)

"If one goes to Madras or Lahore or Rangoon, he may well confuse mission buildings and activities with governmental properties and works. He will see large buildings, well kept and filled with well

dressed crowds of students or with long lines of poor people waiting for free medical treatment. Or some Sunday morning, with the bells ringing a reminder of New England scenes, he will be astonished to see a colorful crowd of natives pouring out from the doors and stopping to gossip in the after-church manner common around the world. He will find large, fine laboratory buildings in which missionary educators are teaching courses in practical chemistry and he will see little difference between mission colleges and the schools in America.

"Some days later he may be in some remote district impatient at his neglect to provide himself with a mosquito net and trying to sleep on the rattan lounge of the railway waiting-room when he hears the sound of a cornet. Being unable to derive any comfort from sleep he will go out to see what the commotion is about and find that a missionary evangelist has set up an outdoor screen on which to project pictures and is telling the story of Christ to a shadowy mass of half nude people who listen with breathless interest.

"In the populous regions in the neighborhood of great Indian cities, Christian missionaries are doing everything in their power to aid in the difficult adjustment of the teeming multitudes to new and often uncongenial tasks. And throughout India at a time when feeling against the white man is appreciable the followers and friends of Christian missionaries have gone out of their way to testify to their trust in those whom they had come to recognize as faithful counselors and friends.

Practical Schools Meet Indian Needs (Subhead)

"Christian mission schools have led in training their students

for a practical life. Agricultural and manual training schools, courses in industrial chemistry and other practical subjects have given a dignity to manual labor and toil which the schools of academic subjects have not. Meeting as they do, the needs of a country which is predominantly agricultural and industrial, mission schools have added very little to such unrest as has been stirred up by the jobless graduates of academic courses. It is probable that the influence of such practical courses will aid considerably in introducing a steadying factor into the political maelstrom.

"Side by side with those utilitarian courses which have been designed to dignify the horny hand of toil and to provide funds from which the Christian community can derive its support, there have been theological courses which have trained young converts for spiritual leadership. The present question is whether the influence of these men will be given to native movements or to supporting the structure of foreign political or spiritual control,

"Although industrial conditions and centers in India have had more than their share in the news of unrest, India is still predominantly an agricultural land whose people live in thousands of widely scattered villages. These remote regions are seldom seen by travelers and even the District Collector and other government officers seldom visit them. But remote indeed is the spot where one cannot find some Christian missionary or hear of the good influence of some native collector or Bible woman. In these days of unrest and distrust, only the proven white man is called into counsel, and one finds missionaries well-informed about conditions in India.

Bridging Gulf of Caste (Subhead)

"Although certain missionaries were lacking in judgment during the troubled days of war, most of the missionaries are well liked by the foreign residents and the natives as well. With caste still a mighty force in Indian life, the Christian missionary is probably the only person who can run the gamut of social contacts from the 'untouchables,' the despised outcasts, to the 'inaccessibles,' whose social position demands exclusiveness.

"There has been in recent years in India, a turning away from the established religions of the land, a revolt against spiritual domination by a priestly class whose faults were evident to all who give thought to the matter. Reform groups have striven to save the intellectuals from the drift toward agnosticism and materialism which has been under way for decades.

"In many mission fields in India, the missionaries are undergoing a humiliating experience which the missionaries in Japan have had to face and which today faces many of the political agents in Eastern lands. When self support has come to Indian churches there has gone in many cases the last chance for an exclusively Occidental interpretation of an Oriental Saviour to an Oriental race. Some native Christians are beginning to insist on thinking for themselves, and many Christian supporters of missions would be surprised to see how native Christians, left to their own devices, can sweep aside Occidentalisms which many westerners consider factors of Christianity, and come to the basic message which an Oriental teacher presented before Oriental audiences of simple folk.

Indian Mental Outlook Changing (Subhead)

"Such asceticism as Christ enjoined for his disciples is held in good repute in India. The missionary who has considered his constituency a potential field for western salesmanship may suffer from a readjustment of the mental outlook of his people which turns away from the machinery of modern industrialism toward the simple life of their fathers. When Gandhi, the most popular leader among the natives, sensing the conflict between God and Mammon, renounced his wealth, he vastly increased his spiritual and political capital. Although many Christian missionaries to India renounced much when they left their home land to labor in foreign fields, that fact is not always apparent to their followers in small Indian villages where the mission compound is the Eden of the community. India is full of faquirs who, in the name of religion will undergo misery, degradation and suffering. Beside them, the Christian missionary seems to be having a very pleasant time, although his American friends may look upon his life as one long sacrifice.

"If he would begin to understand the situation in India the Westerner must recognize the fact that religion is very real to India. It probably occupies a far larger place in the thoughts of the people than it does in the thoughts of many an American deacon. Religion in India is expected to do many things which in America are done by purely material agencies. But in general the missionary problem in India is just what it is in America. There is the same agnostic, the same victim of superstition, the same indifferent man, the same person whose ignorance is his main drawback. But there is one very vital difference.

"In India, except in a few favored communities, the Christian message comes as a promise of a Utopia so much at variance with the lives and thoughts of the people that it stands out as a bright light against a dark night."

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